

# Foucault Studies

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Foucault Studies Special Issue: Foucault and Deleuze, April 2014**

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Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault are widely accepted to be central figures of post-war French philosophy. Philosophers, cultural theorists, and others have devoted considerable effort to the critical examination of the work of each of these thinkers, but despite the strong biographical and philosophical connection between Foucault and Deleuze, very little has been done to explore the relationship between them. This special issue of *Foucault Studies* is the first collection of essays to address this critical deficit with a rigorous comparative discussion of the work of these two philosophers.

### **Deleuze's Course Lectures on Foucault**

In particular, this special issue is motivated by the recent (2011) online publication of Gilles Deleuze's course lectures on Michel Foucault (1985-86) at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (French National Library) in Paris. The BNF collected the available recordings of Deleuze's seminar lectures at the University of Paris 8 and converted them into digital files. Needless to say, the task was a painstaking one, but the mp3 files have now been made accessible online through the Gallica search engine at the library.<sup>1</sup>

When Foucault died in 1984, Deleuze was so affected by the death of his friend, that he began lecturing and writing a book about Foucault's philosophical *corpus* immediately. When asked why he wanted to write such a book, Deleuze was quite clear, "it marks an inner need of mine, my admiration for him, how I was moved by his death, and his unfinished work."<sup>2</sup> Deleuze's desire for some kind of reconciliation with Foucault seems to have been a mutual one. According to Didier Eribon, one of Foucault's most heartfelt wishes, knowing that he would not live long, was to reconcile with Deleuze.<sup>3</sup> After speaking at Foucault's funeral, Deleuze's book project on Foucault began as a lecture series given at the University of Paris 8, between 1985 and 1986. But these lectures were not merely a scholarly commentary on Foucault's work. They were, in the words of Frédéric Gros, "[a] means [of] discovering the found-

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<sup>1</sup> [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 94.

<sup>3</sup> François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, translated by Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 328.

ing principles, [and] laying bare the inherent metaphysics of [Foucault's] thought."<sup>4</sup> "It is amazing to see," Gros admits in an interview with François Dosse, "how Deleuze, who couldn't have had any knowledge of the *Collège de France* lectures, was so accurate in his interpretation."<sup>5</sup>

From 1985 to 1986, Deleuze gave a weekly seminar at the University of Paris 8 every Tuesday on Foucault. The seminars were scheduled for two hours but often lasted three or even four hours, and functioned as a kind of laboratory in which Deleuze would experiment with the ideas and concepts he was in the process of developing. Some of these eventually made their way into his book on Foucault but there are many analyses that find no parallel in his published book, *Foucault*. For this reason, some of the most innovative philosophical scholarship on Foucault can be found in these lectures.

For example, while Deleuze's published book on Foucault is approximately 40,000 words (140 pages) long, his transcribed lectures on Foucault are over 400,000 words long (1600 pages). On April 8, 1986, Deleuze gave a three-hour seminar that developed an original conception of Foucault's concept of biopower through a wide-ranging reinterpretation of the Foucauldian corpus. The seminar is a *tour de force*, and clarifies the enigmatic relationship of Deleuze's concept of "control societies" with Foucault's concept of biopower, that scholars have struggled with for years. However, in his published book on Foucault that was the result of these seminars, the analysis of this entire seminar was compressed into scarcely more than a single page that never even mentions the word "biopower."<sup>6</sup> It would be difficult, even for philosophically informed readers, to discern the breadth of the original analysis from the summary presented in the book. Indeed, Deleuze's published book on Foucault is simply a *précis* of the more detailed material presented in the seminars.

We believe that these lectures offer an incredible contribution to both Deleuze and Foucault studies and an opportunity to formally reflect (in this special issue) on the relationship between two of the greatest thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to this special issue we applied for and received two grants in 2011 to form a team to undertake a transcription of Deleuze's seminar on Foucault. The transcriptions were completed by Annabelle Dufourcq in 2013 and are now available on the Paris 8 website as well as our parallel site at Purdue<sup>7</sup>. In conjunction with the transcription project, we organized an international conference entitled "Between Deleuze and Foucault" in November 2012.<sup>8</sup>

We are now currently working on an English translation of these transcriptions. It is our hope that Deleuze's lectures and this special issue will prompt a critical revaluation of the philosophical connection between Foucault and Deleuze.

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<sup>4</sup> Frédéric Gros, "Le Foucault de Deleuze: une fiction métaphysique" *Philosophie* 47, September (1995), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Gros, "Interview with François Dosse," in Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari*, 327.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 84–85.

<sup>7</sup> [www.cla.purdue.edu/research/deleuze/](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/research/deleuze/)

<sup>8</sup> Video recordings of the lectures are available at:

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/research/deleuze/Conference/Conference%20Schedule.html>.

## Between Foucault and Deleuze

The relationship between Foucault and Deleuze, however, is as strong as it is disparate: it is perhaps best described as a parallelism. As Deleuze says, “I never worked with Foucault. But I do think there are a lot of parallels between our work (with Guattari) and his, although they are, as it were, held at a distance because of our widely differing methods and even our objectives.”<sup>9</sup> While the two were drawn together through their novel readings of Nietzsche, their commitment to a non-teleological theory of history, their activism in contemporary politics (with prisons, ‘68, Palestine, etc.), their return to the stoics, and a theory of the event, Deleuze and Foucault were often decisively divided in their methods and motivations.

For example, what is the difference between Deleuze’s concept of desire and Foucault’s concept of pleasure? Why were the two authors so opposed to the other’s choice in terminology? Is the difference semantic or is there a really an important philosophical difference between them, as some commentators have argued<sup>10</sup>? If both the concepts of desire and pleasure are meant to be radical departures from the psychoanalytic notion of desire as lack, why does Deleuze choose to stick with the psychoanalytic word “desire” and Foucault with the more amorphous term “pleasure”? This divergence is clearly manifest in a letter Deleuze wrote to Foucault. “I cannot give any positive value to pleasure, because pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire. [...] From my point of view, this is precisely how desire is brought under the law of lack and in line with the norm of pleasure.”<sup>11</sup> This divide is also noticeable from Foucault’s side. In an interview recently translated by Nicolae Morar and Daniel W. Smith, Foucault emphasizes this very problem.

“I believe the problem of “pleasure-desire” is currently an important problem. I would even say that it is *the* problem that has to be debated in this reevaluation—this rejuvenation, in any case—of the instruments, objectives, and axes of the struggle. . . . Deleuze and Guattari obviously use the notion in a completely different way. But the problem I have is that I’m not sure if, through this very word, despite its different meaning, we don’t run the risk, despite Deleuze and Guattari’s intention, of allowing some of the medico-psychological presuppositions [*prises*] that were built into desire, in its traditional sense, to be reintroduced. And so it seems to me that, by using the word pleasure, which in the end means nothing, which is still, it seems to me, rather empty of content and unsullied by possible uses—don’t we have here . . . a means of avoiding the entire psychological and medical armature that was built into the traditional notion of desire?”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Fendre les choses, fendre les mots” [1986], in *Pourparlers* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), 117.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Wendy Grace, “*Faux Amis*: Foucault and Deleuze on Sexuality and Desire”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Autumn 2009), 52-75.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Desire and Pleasure,” in *Two Regimes of Madness: texts and interviews 1975-1995*, Edited by David Lapoujade and translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (Semiotexte: Los Angeles, 2006), 131.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Gay Science,” Translated by Dan Smith and Nicolae Morar, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring 2011), 385–403. In his letter, Deleuze mentions an earlier encounter with Foucault when Michel told him, “I cannot bear the word desire; even if you use it in another way,” in Deleuze, “Desire and Pleasure.”

Deleuze similarly expressed concern over the concepts of truth and subjectivity. As Jacques Donzelot recalled, "Deleuze often spoke to me about that, saying: 'Jacques, what do you think, Michel is completely nuts, what's this old idea about truth? He's taking us back to that old idea, veridiction! Oh, it can be!'" Deleuze, in a letter to Foucault, continues, "The danger is: is Michel returning to an analog of the 'constituting subject' and why does he feel the need to resuscitate the truth even if he does make it into a new concept?"<sup>13</sup>

Consider too Foucault and Deleuze's divergent concepts of apparatus (*dispositif*) and assemblage (*agencement*). Both concepts seem to be aiming to replace structuralist concepts of organization with the assembly of heterogeneous elements, but why have they chosen such different terms/methods to do so? Again, are these real philosophical differences that are mutually exclusive? Are they strategic choices relevant in a certain axis of struggle or are they *merely* terminological differences disguising philosophical homologies? While there has been much written on both concepts, very few scholars have taken the time to clarify the differences and similarities between these two concepts in depth and in relation to their original French meanings.

Even, and perhaps especially, in terms of politics, Foucault and Deleuze seem so similar and yet so different. Foucault's concept of biopower (the statistical political control over life itself) and Deleuze's concept of societies of control (post-disciplinary forms of modulated and flexible control) seem to both be offering new concepts of post-institutional/ disciplinary political power. However, Foucault and Deleuze choose very different methods of analysis (genealogy vs. schizoanalysis) and have different motives for doing so (to understand the emergence of liberalism vs. to understand the schizophrenic breakdown of contemporary capitalism). How have these approaches shaped the alternatives that Foucault and Deleuze then propose (ethical self-transformation vs. revolutionary nomadism)? Why does Foucault, in his later work, then turn to a revitalization of the concept of the subject, a term Deleuze rarely uses, except in his book on Foucault? If Foucault was initially in *La Volonté de Savoir* against the use of the word desire because of its historical over-determination, why does he return to the terminology of the subject and self, and including of desire<sup>14</sup>?

The convergences and differences on these topics (and others) between Foucault and Deleuze, are further complicated by a third body of literature: the one they wrote about each other's work. Foucault wrote *Theatrum Philosophicum* (1970) as a review of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and *Logic of Sense* (1969) where he made the oft cited claim that "perhaps, one

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<sup>13</sup> Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 318.

<sup>14</sup> As Foucault notes in the Introduction to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (translated by Robert Hurley, NY: Vintage, 1990), his intention was "to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called 'the history of *desiring man*'" (p.6; italics added).

day, this century [the twentieth] will be called ‘the Deleuzian century.’”<sup>15</sup> The two also recorded a conversation entitled “Intellectuals and Power” (1972), later publishing it in a special edition of the journal, *L’Arc* dedicated to Deleuze’s works<sup>16</sup>. After Foucault’s death, Deleuze published his book, *Foucault* (1986) soon after, of course. Deleuze also wrote several articles on Foucault, “Breaking Things Open, Breaking Words Open,” “Life as a Work of Art,” “A Portrait of Foucault”, as well as a private letter to Foucault, delivered by François Ewald in 1977, titled, “Desire and Pleasure” (1994). These writings clarify some issues while multiplying and deepening others. Above all, they express a deep admiration and complex philosophical friendship whose implications have yet to be fully explored.

### A Philosophical Friendship

In addition to their philosophical similarities and differences, it is also important to reflect on the nature of the friendship between Foucault and Deleuze. Together, Deleuze and Foucault launched a French revival of Nietzsche against phenomenology. In 1977, they helped co-edited Nietzsche’s complete works for Gallimard;<sup>17</sup> they attended a major Nietzsche conferences together (1964);<sup>18</sup> and they were both close friends of Pierre Klossowski, who dedicated his book *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969)<sup>19</sup> to Deleuze and *The Baphomet* (1965)<sup>20</sup> to Foucault.

Both Deleuze and Foucault were political activists together in the *Prison Information Group* (GIP). As Judith Revel interestingly suggests in an interview with François Dosse: “Foucault took experience and practices [from the GIP] as his point of departure and conceptualized from there. Deleuze and Guattari invented war machines then tried them out.”<sup>21</sup> Whereas Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish* only after the GIP, Deleuze and Guattari became interested in the decentralized non-representational structure of the GIP only after writing about these themes in *Anti-Oedipus*. In each case the GIP gave birth to a whole new relation between intellectuals and power for both Deleuze and Foucault. “A theorizing intellectual, for us,” they say “is no longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness”.<sup>22</sup> Their involvement in the GIP, according the Deleuze’s seminar on Foucault, was not at all an “academic critique of representation,” but as a specifically “practical critique of representation,”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Foucault made this remark in his 1970 essay on Deleuze, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” which is included in *The Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 2, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, Edited by James D. Faubion; Translated by Roburt Hurley and others (London: Penguin Press, 1998), 343, translation modified.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, “Entretien: les intellectuels et le pouvoir”, *L’Arc*, Volume 49, (1980), 3-11.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Œuvres philosophiques complètes*, edited by Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, et al, (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 307.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, translated by Daniel W. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *The Baphomet*, translated by Sophie Hawkes and Stephen Sartarelli (Hygiene: Eridanos Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Judith Revel, “Interview with François Dosse,” in Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 313.

<sup>22</sup> Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 312.

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Paris-VIII Foucault Seminar*, BNF audio archives, Jan 7, 1986.

that supported a “non centralized movement” that “we both” saw as an extension of the events of May 1968.<sup>24</sup>

But the friendship between Deleuze and Foucault is also marked by a long silence. Why? A plausible hypothesis goes back to the time when Foucault and Deleuze both demonstrated against the deportation of the Baader-Meinhof group’s attorney Klaus Croissant from France, but Foucault refused to sign the petition because he wanted to more carefully define his support for Croissant?<sup>25</sup> Perhaps it was because Deleuze hated the *nouveaux philosophes*, whereas Foucault supported them? Perhaps it was because Deleuze supported Mitterrand’s Socialist presidency, but Foucault thought it was best to criticize them, just as one would criticize any other party in power? Or perhaps it was because “Foucault didn’t not like *Anti-Oedipus*,” as Jacques Donzelot claims.<sup>26</sup> Or perhaps, it was the infamous letter Deleuze wrote to Foucault criticizing his concept of pleasure in the *History of Sexuality*? Or perhaps, as Deleuze says, in a 1990 interview with James Miller, when asked directly about his and Foucault’s mutual silence:

“(1) There’s obviously no single answer. One of us could have answered one way one day and another way the next. Not because we are fickle. But because there are many reasons in this area and no single reason is “essential.” And because none of them is essential, there are always several answers at once. The only important thing is that I had long agreed with him philosophically and on specific occasions, I no longer made the same evaluations as he did on several points at once. (2) This didn’t lead to any “cooling” of relations between us, or to any “explanations.” We saw each other less often, as if by the force of circumstances. And from there on, it became more and more difficult to meet up again. It is strange, we didn’t stop seeing each other because we didn’t get along, but because we weren’t seeing each other any more, a kind of incomprehension or distance between us took hold. (3) I can tell you that I constantly miss seeing him, increasingly so. So what stopped me from calling him? That’s where a deeper reason comes into it. Rightly or wrongly, I believed that he wanted greater solitude, for his life, for his thinking; that he needed this solitude, keeping in touch only with the people who were close to him. I now think that I should have tried to see him again, but I think I didn’t try out of respect. I am still suffering from not having seen him again, even more so because I don’t think there were any external reasons.”<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

With the growing interest in Foucault’s recently translated course lectures at the *Collège de France* (1973–1984), and our recent transcription of Deleuze’s course lectures on Foucault, released by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (2011), the editors of this special issue believe that the time is right to address the relationship between these two great thinkers directly. This collection of essays thus brings together both senior and junior scholars from diverse

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> This hypothesis is further developed by Paul Patton in “Activism, Philosophy, and Actuality in Deleuze and Foucault,” *Deleuze Studies*, vol. 4, 2010, supplement, 84-103, especially 85.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Donzelot, “Interview with François Dosse,” in Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 315.

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to James Miller (February 7, 1990),” in James Miller, *Michel Foucault* (Paris: Plon, 1993), 346.

backgrounds to clarify the implications of this important philosophical encounter between Foucault and Deleuze.

Marco Altamirano's essay focuses on the shared concepts of "milieu" and "machine," in Deleuze and Foucault. Vernon W. Cisney's essay defend's a Deleuzian politics by drawing on an important political concept shared with Foucault: "becoming other." William E. Connolly's essay offers an exploration of creativity and the ambiguous role it plays in the understanding of freedom that we find in Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Foucault. Erin Gilson's essay offers an original account of the shared methodology of "problematization" found in both Deleuze and Foucault. Wendy Grace's essay traces Deleuze and Foucault's shared Nietzschean philosophical origins. Chris Penfield's essay articulates a theory of "transversal politics" common to both Deleuze and Foucault. Finally, Dianna Taylor's essay compares the respective ontologies of Deleuze and Foucault. We would also like to thank Alan Rosenberg for his invitation to publish this special issue and Ditte Vilstrup Holm for all her helpful editorial work. We greatly appreciate all their support in putting together the present collection.

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